



Duane and Cathy Pung, Stearns county, Minnesota

Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)

This Farm Bill conservation program helps land users address serious threats to soil, water and related natural resources including soil erosion and water quality degradation. EQIP offers financial and technical assistance to help landowners install or apply structural, vegetative and management practices called for in conservation contracts.

Local Work Groups (LWG)

Locally led conservation was highlighted and prioritized in the implementation of the 2003 EQIP. Local Work Groups, based on Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) boundaries, chaired by the NRCS District Conservationist and facilitated by SWCD staff and board members, held meetings to identify natural resources concerns and recommended EQIP 2003 priorities. National natural resource concerns and others identified locally were then utilized with a scoring worksheet to score and rank EQIP applications. This same process was also used on a regional basis for groups of counties coinciding with the seven NRCS/SWCD area boundaries.

"The EQIP program is a wonderful opportunity for conservation practices to be implemented on Minnesota's working lands. The leadership at the Natural Resources Conservation Service field offices and Soil and Water Conservation Districts has made this a locally driven conservation program. The conservation practices that landowners have installed through EQIP will have major conservation impacts for years to come. NRCS and SWCDs can be proud of their hard work." LeAnn Buck, Executive Director, Minnesota Association of Soil & Water Conservation Districts

Allocations were also made to each of the 91 SWCD boundary levels and to Area boundaries. This allowed local and area NRCS personnel to fund contracts in ranked order focused on their local and area priorities. This system yielded EQIP contracts in 85 counties. This compared to 40 counties in previous years when a State level scoring and application process was in place.

"EQIP has been significantly improved under the 2002 Farm Bill and provides greater opportunity and funding to address single and whole farm conservation resource needs. Just as important, Minnesota NRCS State Conservationist, Bill Hunt, has established the policy of allowing a diverse group of local stakeholders determine the local conservation resource priorities and funding. All Minnesotans will be the beneficiaries of this responsive, innovative, and locally-led process of government."

John Monson, State Executive Director, Minnesota Farm Service Agency

\$15,661,000 of EQIP funds were obligated with Minnesota producers in 1,210 contracts for an average contract value of \$12,943. Statewide, 1,527 applications were received for a total of \$18,126,000 in EQIP requests.

52% (\$8,127,000) of the total was dedicated to animal livestock natural resources concerns. This includes the following conservation practices:

- o 118 wastewater and feedlot runoff control systems
- o 240 fencing projects
- o 5,710 acres of pasture planting
- o 147 contracts having over 650,000 feet of livestock water pipelines
- o 180 contracts including 47,000 acres of prescribed grazing
- o 8 roof runoff management systems for clean water diversion around feedlots
- o 255 contracts on 145,000 acres of nutrient management with manure
- o 144 contracts with livestock watering facilities
- o 29 livestock water supply wells
- o 28 abandoned waste facilities to be closed in an environmentally safe manner.

The additional funds were used for other natural resources concerns. These include the following erosion control practices with \$6,430,000 (41%) in practices like:

- o 384 contracts for 195,000 acres of crop residue management
- o 71 grade stabilization structures
- o 193 grassed waterways
- o 11 contracts with over 1 mile of shoreline erosion controlled
- o 35 terrace systems
- o 197 water and sediment control basins

Non-livestock related water quality practices for \$470,000 with practices like:

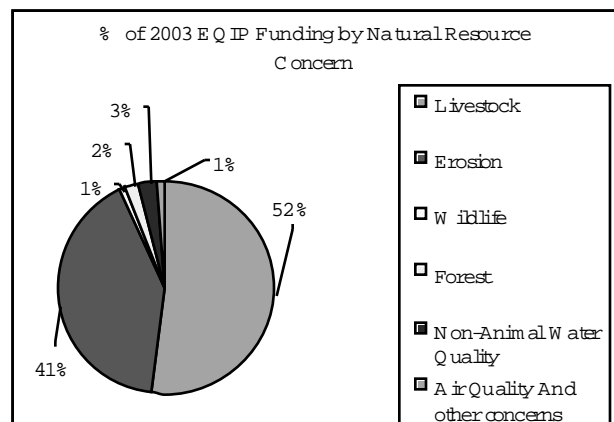
- o 71 wells sealed and decommissioned
- o 5 riparian buffers
- o 209 contracts on 104,000 acres of nutrient management
- o 129 contracts on 70,000 acres of pest management

\$626,000 was obligated to forestry, wildlife, air and other natural resources concerns. A few examples include:

- o Windbreaks
- o Tree planting
- o Wildlife habitat management
- o Wetland restoration
- o Native ecosystem management

Assisting producers who raise crops and livestock organically with their natural resources concerns was also a focus in FY-03. Organic conservation cropping systems were funded with 55 producers on 14,000 acres for \$653,000. These cropping systems reduce impacts to water quality, increase soil quality and provide other benefits. In addition, organic prescribed grazing was obligated with 17 producers on 2,800 acres.

In addition to obligating this new \$15.7 million in FY-03, hundreds of practices were implemented from previously funded EQIP contracts. In excess of \$1 million was paid to Minnesota producers to complete these practices.



Duane and Cathy Pung's barnyard shown prior to EQIP practice installation in Stearns county, Minnesota



Conservation practice installed on the Pung barnyard